

Technology's arrow : developing information networks for public administration in Britain and the United States

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Stellingen

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Technology's Arrow
Developing Information Networks for Public Administration
in Britain and the United States

door Sally Wyatt

1. The categories and concepts of actors and analysts of science and technology need to be treated symmetrically. This allows us to include 'invisible' and 'irrelevant' social groups, which might be missed if we simply followed the actors. It also forces us to include technological determinism - an explanation used by some social actors to justify their actions - in our analyses of socio-technical change.
2. Just as it is important to treat technology seriously, it is important to treat technological determinism seriously, to disentangle different types and to understand the purposes for which it is used by social actors. Vociferous rejections and denunciations of technological determinism by the 'science, technology and society' studies (STS) community have resulted in inadequate analyses of the power of technological determinism in the real world.
3. European landscapes are constant reminders of the fact that the distinction between 'nature' and 'culture' is both constructed and shifting over time and place. This is particularly true for the Dutch land- and seascapes, where the role of science and technology in the re/production of the nature/culture distinction is very visible. This may explain the strength of the STS tradition within the Netherlands.
4. In the teaching of STS, the study of fiction has been neglected to the detriment of students' learning. Many students develop an interest in STS through reading and watching science fiction; once they enter universities, the imaginative appeal of literature is replaced with the dryer literature of academic writers. Fiction is not a substitute for theory but it is better able to capture the complex, underdetermined nature of the STS relationship.
5. Until the early 1990s, electrical appliances in Britain were sold without plugs. Plugs had to be bought separately and wired to the appliance by the consumer. This deeply peculiar custom was completely taken for granted by British people. As such, the ability to wire a plug became a test of one's Britishness. In addition, throughout the 1970s and 1980s, British feminists reproduced these imperial power relationships: an ability to wire a plug was a test of one's credentials as a (British) feminist.

6. Cars and 'Windows' are abominations. Corporations have pursued increased markets and individuals have been made illusory promises of greater flexibility and easier use. The symbolic decoupling of machine power from masculinity may help to reduce congestion, noise and pollution on the highways and byways in both the real world and cyberspace.
7. Irony is often mistaken as a sign of detachment rather than as a sign of imaginative engagement with words and objects. Irony and metaphor can be effective pedagogic and rhetorical devices because they force us to look anew at what we might otherwise take for granted and they can serve as a bridge from the known to the unknown. There are dangers in using such devices, however, particularly as it is impossible to over-estimate students' and readers' inclinations to literal-mindedness.
8. Absolutism and relativism have one feature in common: an inability to empathise. In the first case, this can lead to dogmatism and martyrdom; in the second to indifference and apathy. Thus, despite its weaknesses, pluralism remains the only approach which is consistent with humanism.
9. Shostakovich's 15th Symphony (1971) borrows from Wagner and from the William Tell Overture of Rossini. It was also inspired by the musical scores of Disney cartoons. As such, it demonstrates both the potential reach and appeal of Shostakovich's music and that there is nothing new in postmodernism.
10. 'November 5' is one of the few British customs that is neither pagan in origin nor Victorian in invention. It is celebrated throughout Britain with bonfires, fireworks and the burning of effigies of Guy Fawkes. Guy Fawkes had been a soldier with the Spanish army occupying the Low Countries. On 5 November 1605, he was found in the cellar of Westminster, together with thirty-six barrels of gunpowder. This was part of an alleged plot to kill the Protestant king, James I and the Lords on the opening of Parliament in protest at the continuing persecution of Catholics. Over the past 400 years, doubt has emerged about what the King's intelligence services knew prior to the event, whether there was a double agent amongst the conspirators and whether the plot was allowed to proceed as far as it did in order to justify subsequent intensification of the persecution of Catholics.